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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: BAKER-HAMILTON REPORT, GCC SUMMIT

11. SUMMARY: Private daily "Al-Watan" hails the "positive" recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton report and criticizes the Israeli response to it. State-owned "Oman" says that this year's GCC summit should focus on solving domestic problems in Arab Gulf states. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

12. U.S./Embassy content featured prominently in the Omani press this week. On December 6 and 7, all Omani dailies gave prominent coverage to the Muscat visit of Shaun Donnelly, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Europe and the Middle East, in Oman for a forum on the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement sponsored jointly by Embassy Muscat and the Omani government. On December 10, the English-language "Oman Tribune" (circulation 8,000) ran a color photograph of Ambassador and Mrs. Grappo's reception for Saim Caglayan, the featured artist for the Art in Embassies program. On December 12, Oman's other English-language papers "Times of Oman" (circulation 25,000) and "Oman Daily Observer" (circulation 20,000) both ran articles about the artist, along with his picture.

BLOCK QUOTES: ISG RECOMMENDATIONS "POSITIVE"

13. On December 7, "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) highlighted the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton report in an editorial titled, "Entre to the New Year?"

"The formation of the Baker-Hamilton group by the American administration saves face for America in an effort to curb the chaos in Iraq that has approached civil war and threatens to draw in neighboring states. The report is positive; it seeks to limit the catastrophic Iraq policies that have resulted in the deaths of over 650,000 Iraqis, in addition to destroying infrastructure, polluting the environment, and converting Iraq into a theater of conflict for terrorists from different countries. It is too early to know if America is going to commit to its 79 recommendations. However, it is worth noting that some of these recommendations were positive, and that they might form a very important shift in American foreign policy towards the Middle East when implemented."

ISRAELI VIEWS OF BAKER-HAMILTON

14. On December 8, "Al-Watan" criticized Israeli views on the

Baker-Hamilton report in an article entitled, "Why Turn Away from the Truth?"

"Western politicians should confess that they are the main causes of the complications in the Middle East. This is simply because they have allowed Israeli leaders to take any actions that are expedient for them. Western leaders are puppets that advocate and defend Israeli positions. The Baker-Hamilton report illustrated this, and therefore the Israeli Prime Minister criticized it. While Washington and many capitals around the world have appreciated the Baker-Hamilton recommendations, the Israelis have rejected it and are trying to return the situation to one where Israel can do whatever it wants with no external pressure...Western and Israeli leaders are all swimming against the truth."

GCC SUMMIT IN RIYADH

¶5. On December 11 a columnist in "Oman" (circulation 38,000) wrote about "The GCC Summit and the Need to Discard Hypocrisy":

"The 27th GCC summit has shed light on the challenges that GCC countries face today, which will affect their future. This latest summit brings to mind the security rationale behind the creation of the GCC, which happened at the time of the Iran-Iraq war. Those two countries remain embroiled in crisis. Iraq is languishing under an American invasion, with an absence of security and political stability. Iran's nuclear program is a worry to Arab Gulf states. The Iran-Iraq War spurred the Arab Gulf states to form a regional body, the GCC, which then failed to fulfill its role, and showed its weakness, when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Gulf countries face the difficult task of balancing domestic and external problems... The agenda of this summit should exceed the issue of the UAE islands or

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the Lebanese and Palestinian crises and should include GCC domestic issues. Before fixing external problems, there must be internal reform."

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